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## Saturday – Day of Absence

Where was Jesus?

It is always risky to speak on matters where the Bible seems to be silent. There is a temptation within the human spirit to try and tell others more than we know. I promise to guard against that temptation. Having said that, I do believe it is important to note certain aspects of this Day of Absence that also was a day of silence in the ministry of Jesus. Actually I have delightfully discovered that the Bible tells us much more than you might think about Jesus' whereabouts from Friday to Sunday morning. Where was Jesus from the time He breathed His last breath on the cross on Friday, until His first resurrection appearance on Sunday morning?

First, we know that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in fulfillment of prophecy, Isa 53:9; Matt 27:57-61. Since it was evening, after sundown, Jesus was actually placed in the tomb after the beginning of the Sabbath. This was done on Friday evening. Second, on Saturday, the Pharisees went to Pontius Pilate and requested that the tomb be secured so that the disciples could not steal the body and claim that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead as He had predicted. Pilate granted the request, sealing the stone and setting a guard by the tomb, Matt 27:62-66. So the body was secured in the tomb sometime early Saturday. The tomb was sealed, the Roman seal placed on it, and guards were stationed there. But on Sunday morning, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was open, and the body of Jesus was gone, leaving only the linen wrappings laying undisturbed as though the body had evaporated from them, see John 20:1-10. So, where was Jesus after He died on the cross until His first resurrection appearance on Sunday morning? Consider the following:

### **Jesus Was Not in Hell**

First, I feel compelled to address this popular but erroneous conclusion. Jesus did lead captivity captive as stated in Ephesians 4:8-9. But there is no Scripture that says Jesus "descended into hell." This is a concept perpetuated by the Apostle's Creed. Jesus used the term "*Hades*" in Luke 16:23 to describe the destination of the rich man. But "*Hades*" is not a polite "cuss" word for hell. *Hades* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "*Sheol*." Both terms should best be translated as "the grave" or "the realm of the dead." Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus gives us many insights into the grave. He revealed that there are two compartments in *Hades*, one called *Gehenna* and one called Paradise. There are numerous suggestions about Jesus going to *Hades* and suggestions about what He

did there. Here are some of the explanations as to the whereabouts of Jesus between His death and burial on Friday and the resurrection on that first resurrection Sunday morning:

1. First, some claim Jesus descended into *sheol* or *tartarus* to preach the Gospel either to fallen angels or to lost antediluvians to offer a second opportunity for salvation. This view fails the test of Scripture which says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment," Heb 9:27. Judgment follows death, and there is nothing in Scripture anywhere that holds forth hope of a second chance to be saved in the grave. This cannot be true because it is contrary to Scripture in Romans 1:19-21, which says that all are without excuse, capable of knowing God and held responsible therefore for knowing Him.
2. Second, some claim that in the interim, between the crucifixion and the resurrection, Christ descended into *sheol* (*descensus as inferos*) to announce judgment upon the antediluvians. The problem with this view is that it is difficult to imagine why Christ would have to announce judgment on those who already were suffering in the place of judgment, or why the antediluvians would be singled out for this dishonorable mention. Jesus' teaching on *hades* in Luke 16:22-23, makes it clear that there are two compartments in *sheol*. One is called the "bosom of Abraham," which is the presence of God. The other is the place of torment and hell fire, where the worm does not die, see Mark 9:43-44. Luke 16:22-23 makes clear that those in *gehenna* were already experiencing, and were under, irreversible judgment.
3. Third, another explanation is that a descent took place at the same time proposed in options 1 and 2 above, but the purpose was to announce judgment upon the fallen angels. The place was *tartarus*, the supposed prison for fallen angels (see 2 Pet 2:4). This variant interpretation suffers from the same problem as numbers 1 and 2. If these angels were in chains and under judgment, what purpose would be served by the announcement of judgment on them? Some appeal to an interpretation of Genesis 6:1-8, that involves cohabitation of demons and human females, a highly untenable view. The point is simple. One untenable passage cannot validate another untenable passage.
4. A fourth explanation of Jesus' whereabouts is that a descent into *sheol* took place at the same time proposed in options 1, 2, and 3 above. The purpose of this was to enter Paradise, the upper story of *sheol*, where the Old Testament believers awaited the blood of Christ. Therefore, Christ descended to lead the Old Testament believers to heaven. Adherents of

this view appeal to Ephesians 4:8-10, regarding Jesus' descending to the lower parts of the earth and leading "captivity captive." There is no basis for the fanciful argument that Old Testament believers had to await Jesus' death on the cross to be led to heaven by Him. The context of Ephesians 4:8-10 has nothing to do with the afterlife, *per se*, but with Jesus' earthly ministry by which He came to equip and empower believers to preach the Gospel.

5. A fifth and final explanation is that there was no *descensus ad inferos* or "descent into hell" at all. The reference to Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison refers to His preaching by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through Noah to the antediluvians for a hundred and twenty years, Gen 6:3. This perspective provides us with the most plausible view of the Holy Spirit's role in the communication of the Gospel message. The Holy Spirit doubtless was in the preaching of Noah for a hundred and twenty years, a point affirmed by 1 Peter 3:20. This was a type or foregleam of the coming work of Christ, which is affirmed in 1 Peter 1:21-22, that likewise the Holy Spirit was at work in the preaching of Christ, and continues to be at work in us as per John 14:15-24 and 16:5-15.

The "captivity" led captive passage in Ephesians 4:8 celebrates Jesus' victory over the "power of Satan, sin, death, and the grave," see *The Believer's Study Bible*, p. 1680, note on Ephesians 4:4-9. Jesus' descent was not into "hell" or "hell fire," i.e. *gehenna*, but into the "lower parts of the earth," Eph 4:9, or the grave, *hades*. There He celebrated the liberation that His death on the cross purchased for all believers and guaranteed for them for eternity. He celebrated also the sealing of eternal doom for our adversary, Satan. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus, we learn that there are compartments within *Sheol*, *Hades*, or the grave. The compartment Jesus referred to as "the bosom of Abraham" represents Paradise, which is the "first heaven" of Revelation 21:1, the present place where God is located. The other place is *gehenna*, the place of alienation, spiritual death, fire, and brimstone, where Satan and all of his demons are consigned.

For a much more complete discussion of these points see, Paige Patterson, *A Pilgrim Priesthood: An Exposition of First Peter*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982, pp. 134-146.

### **Jesus Was Not in Soul Sleep**

When Jesus said to His disciples, "Lazarus is asleep" in John 11:11, it was not an endorsement of soul sleep. It was a simple observation that the dead appear to

simply be asleep. Some erroneously teach that the dead are in a sleep state, some state of spiritual unconsciousness, until they are awakened at the coming of Christ. The following six biblical facts rule out any such notion of soul sleep.

1. When A Believer Dies - The Bible clearly teaches that when a believer dies, the spirit leaves the body behind and goes to the presence of God immediately, 2 Cor 5:8.
2. The Thief on the Cross - To the thief who asked Jesus to save him, Jesus answered, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," Luke 23:43.
3. The Writer of Hebrews - In Hebrews 12:1, the writer tells us that even now there is a great cloud of witnesses, which refers to those heroes of the faith that are described immediately before in Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 12:23, he adds that when we worship God we not only come into His presence, but into the presence of the "spirits of just men made perfect," which would be the spirits of believers who are already in His presence.
4. The Transfiguration - At the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. They were not asleep, but they were talking with Jesus about His coming death, burial, and resurrection.
5. The Revelation - In John's vision, he was taken into the presence of God. In Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-10, the Bible clearly says those martyred for the faith have gone into the presence of God and are praying and praising Him. Note that Revelation 6:10 states that those in heaven are calling on God to avenge them for those who are still on earth. This again is evidence that these spirits already are in heaven while events continue on earth prior to the Day of Judgment and Jesus' return. Likewise in Revelation 7:9, John saw a host that could not be numbered by him, who were believers already in the presence of God.
6. Jesus' Teaching About the Afterlife - Jesus gave us a window into the afterlife through His teaching on the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Both the rich man and Lazarus had died. Both of them were conscious in the afterlife. Both of them were able to feel things, even though they were disembodied spirits. This event was clearly prior to the Day of Judgment because the rich man wanted someone to go and tell his brothers they must avoid coming to this place of torment. Neither of them was in any soul sleep state.

These passages clearly deny any concept of soul sleep for believers or lost alike. They do reaffirm the finality of decisions about our eternal destiny being settled in this life, before we wake up in eternity. This tells me clearly that wherever Jesus was, He was alive and well.

## Where Was Jesus According to Scripture?

1. Jesus Went to Paradise - This is what Jesus told the thief on the cross when He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise," Luke 23:43. The Greek word "παράδεισος," *paradeisos*, translated "paradise," is taken from a Persian word meaning a "garden." It is a place of indescribable joy and blessing because it is the place of the presence of God as described by Paul in his letter to the church in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6. We know from Paul's discussion that paradise and heaven are the same place. John also saw a new heaven and a new earth that God will make. So, in Jesus' own words, He told the thief who was saved, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise," Luke 23:43. So where is Paradise?

Let us carefully look at what Jesus revealed to the thief and to us. **First**, Jesus said "today," which was that Good Friday when Jesus was about to depart His physical body by way of death on the cross. He told the thief that He and the thief would be in the presence of God that very day. This is consistent with 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, which says when we are "absent from the body," we are "present with the Lord." When Jesus left His mortal body, He went immediately to Paradise, the current place known as the "first heaven," Rev 21:1.

**Second**, Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "You will be with me." They were both going to Paradise, the presence of God the Father, called heaven. So in Jesus' own words, He tells us He would be there, but we know that His body was left behind, prepared for burial, and placed in the tomb, see John 19:38-42.

**Third**, Jesus said that they both would be "in Paradise." How could the human mind ever imagine, much less explain, what it is like to be in Paradise, the first heaven, in the presence of God, in the company of Jesus and all the believers of all the ages? According to his own testimony in 2 Corinthians 12:4, Paul experienced heaven in a vision of God. No wonder he wrote, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him," 1 Cor 2:9. Paul was quoting from Isaiah 64:4 (see 64:1-12) and Isaiah 65:17 (see 65:13-25).

2. Jesus' Life Continued in His Spiritual Body - We know definitely from Scripture that Jesus was with God in His spiritual body, and the physical body He had occupied on earth was in the tomb. All of the gospels report that Jesus cried out and gave up His Spirit. John says that Jesus stated, "It is finished," John 19:30. But, Luke also reports the exact final words of Jesus. Jesus' last words were, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,"

Luke 23:46. From this we know that Jesus' spiritual body departed the physical body to be with the Father in heaven and Paradise. This is exactly what the New Testament means when it says Jesus was the firstfruits, 1 Cor 15:20-23, and that absence from the physical body is presence with the Lord, 2 Cor 5:6-8. To get a thorough explanation of this process for Christ and all believers see the detailed explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

On that first resurrection morning, Jesus returned to the physical body He had left in the tomb and resurrected and reoccupied it. He appeared to Mary in that body and told her His physical body had not yet been glorified, so she could not touch Him, John 20:17. Apparently sometime between the morning and the final appearance to all the disciples that evening, Jesus' physical body was glorified. By the time He met with the disciples that evening behind closed doors, He invited them to touch Him, Luke 24:36-40. This suggests that He had been with the Father and by this time His body had been changed, as it will be for all believers, 1 Cor 15:51-58.

3. Jesus - The Angel of the Lord of the Old Testament - First, angels in general are created beings with spiritual bodies. It is clear in Scripture that these spiritual beings appear quite human, see e.g. Gen 18:1-2; Josh 5:13-15; Judg 13:3-6; Dan 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26. Jesus appeared in the Old Testament repeatedly as a spiritual being known as "the Angel of the Lord" (see chart page 30 CSB), see also Gen 18:2; Josh 5:13-15; Judg 13:18; Zech 1:7-17. Later He invited the disciples to touch Him after He received His glorified body, John 20:27. There are at least fifteen prominent theophanies, appearances of God, in the Old Testament that could be classified as Christophanies, appearances of Christ, in the form of a heavenly emissary known as the "Angel of the Lord." He appeared to Hagar, Gen 16:7-10; Abraham, Gen 22:11-13; Jacob, Gen 32:24-30; Moses, Exod 3:1-8; the people of Israel twice, Exod 14:19-20 and 23:20-23; Balaam, Numb 22:22-35; Joshua, Josh 5:13-15; the Hebrews in the time of the Judges, Judg 2:1-3; Gideon, Judg 6:11-24; Elijah, 1 Kgs 19:4-8; David, 1 Chr 21:16-22; citizens of Jerusalem, Isa 37:36; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, Dan 3:25; and a Messenger in the Temple, Mal 3:1. In addition to these appearances, the phrase appears sixty-one times, including the fifteen above, in the Old Testament as a proper name. After the birth of Jesus, "the Angel of the Lord" as a special personal emissary of God, never appears again.

It is certainly possible that during the time after His death, but before the resurrection of His human form, Jesus would have been able to revert to His spiritual form seen in the Old Testament as "the Angel of the Lord." After

His human form was resurrected and glorified, "the Angel of the Lord" would and did disappear forever, except as a figure in Old Testament history.

### **What Purposes Mark the Day of Absence?**

There are at least five purposes that were served by Jesus' waiting until that first resurrection morning to rise from the dead.

1. The silence of God is significant. For the three years of His earthly ministry, the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees sought to silence Jesus. Jesus was silent before sinners, John 8:6; the High Priest, Caiaphus, Matt 26:62-63; Pontius Pilate, Matt 27:14; and Herod, Luke 23:9. Jesus was the highest and most glorious revelation of God to humanity, Heb 1:1-4, and the human family and Jews rejected Him. He had no more to say, see Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-29.
2. The day of silence was actually a Sabbath, the day of rest. It was normally a day of inactivity like the first Sabbath that was blessed, hallowed, and sanctified by God, Gen 2:3. God rested after creating the physical world. This rest after His crucifixion was Jesus' Sabbath rest after the creative work of His redemption. The mortal body that had served Jesus in this life was allowed to have a Sabbath rest.
3. This was a day of sealing. Matthew tells us that the tomb was sealed on the next day, Saturday, by the Romans at the request of the chief priests and the Pharisees, Matt 27:62. At their request, Pontius Pilate sealed the stone and set the seal of the Roman government on it. This was a necessary event that gave legal proof that Jesus was dead, Matt 27:63-66.
4. This day was necessary to fulfill Scripture that Jesus would rise again on the third day. The scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, and He told them no sign would be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah, Matt 12:39-40. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man, Jesus' human form, would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
5. Waiting to rise on the first day, which would be known as the "eighth" day. Eight is the day of new beginnings and also is the messianic number in Scripture. It is important to note that the Sabbath did not cease to exist, nor was it moved to the first day of the week. The first day of the week was the "Lord's Day," see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Rev 1:10. The church worshipped both on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day for a time, but when more and more Gentiles became believers, there was no consensus for the Gentile churches to continue to worship on the Sabbath, and worship became exclusively associated with Sunday, the "Lord's Day," in celebration of the resurrection.

Jesus rose on the first day of the week, Sunday, in fulfillment of the three days and three nights He was to spend in the grave. The Jews count any part of any one day as a whole day and night. It seems confusing to the western mind, but day starts at sunset, so Friday night began on Thursday at sunset. Saturday night began on Friday, and Sunday night began on Saturday. The day or daylight hours also were Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, thus fulfilling Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 12:39-40.

### **Lessons From Saturday**

1. The Bible tells us more about where Jesus was from the time of His death on the cross until resurrection morning than one would think. We are so familiar with some of these passages that we often miss their deepest truths.
2. Jesus had a spiritual body before His incarnation. That spiritual body is known as the Angel of the Lord in numerous Old Testament passages.
3. There is no biblical basis for the claim that Jesus went into "hell," or that He was asleep in the tomb.
4. The Apostle's Creed, written in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, is in error when it claims that Jesus "descended into hell."
5. The clear teaching that Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection and we will follow His same pattern is comforting to all of us in the loss of our loved ones. They are not sleeping but even now are with Him.
6. In addition the day of absence serves the five purposes outlined above.